

Leon Paul Novice Open 2015

Cambridge sent a strong squad to compete in the Leon Paul Novice Open, an individual Foil competition open to those with 2 years experience or less. Victoria Mascetti (Women's II Varsity 2015), Tiffany Mak (Women's II Varsity 2015, Novice Varsity 2014), Lucy Miller & Nenko Nenov (both Novice Varsity 2015) represented the Light Blues on the day.

During the initial (mixed gender) round of poules, all three of the girls initially struggled against some of the more 'robust' fencing from the men. However, Nenov laid down an early marker, emerging unbeaten from the first round. The second round of poules marked the start of the separate men's & women's competitions. Freed from those male fencers apparently armed with bludgeons rather than foils, the ladies' class began to tell, with Mascetti seeding 1st overall as the only unbeaten fencer. Miller seeded 3rd, and Mak 6th, the latter only dropping a fight to her fellow Cantab. Nenov continued unbeaten, but seeded 2nd on indicator.

The last 16 saw Mascetti & Nenov handed byes due to their high seeding, while Miller and Mak dispatched their opponents with ease, 15-4 and 15-5. Unfortunately, the quarter finals saw the two of them draw each-other. Miller took an early lead, but Mak intelligently changed her game to revenge her earlier defeat 15-7, and leave her opponent finishing 5th overall.

Mascetti drew Oxfr*rd's only representative in the Last 8, and applied brains to match her opponent's strength, steadily building a lead to run out comfortable winner 15-7, leaving her opponent to finish 8th. Seeing the sole OUFC Novice Varsity fencer finish three places below the lowest Cambridge finisher went a long way towards avenging Cambridge's agonising 1 hit defeat in April. Nenov's opponent had won his previous fight 15-5, but Nenko proved himself a class above again, winning the quarter final by the same score. Mak's quarter final brought her up against a London FC fencer, who sucked her into a close quarters battle, with Tif coming off worse. Mak rallied after the break, but while her change of plan gave her back the advantage, the damage was done and she succumbed 15-9, finishing 3rd overall.

Mascetti made herself work harder than she needed to in her semi-final against an opponent who had perhaps more tenacity than quality, but she calmly overcame a deficit to win comfortably enough in the end, 15-9. Nenov allowed himself to rush a little in the semi, and went into the break leading 14-7. An uncomfortable moment followed when his opponent won three hits in a row, but Nenov kept his nerve to close out the match 15-10.

Both finals were tense affairs. The women's final pitched Mascetti against the second seed from London who had done for Tiffany in the previous round. Fatigue had set in, and the fight went hit-for-hit well into the second period. However, Mascetti's quality prevailed and she ran out the winner 15-12.

Nenov faced the top seed, from Queen Mary University in the men's final. His opponent, of similar experience to Nenko, hadn't dropped more than 7 hits in either of his previous elimination fights. This fight was some of the best quality fencing of the day, and the early exchanges were even, both fencers displaying excellent movement and exchanging series of blistering counter-ripostes. Nenov built a lead with his trademark attack to sixte, before his opponent improved his defence, obliging Nenko to force corps-a-corps numerous times in order to avoid being hit. The tide turned, and the scoreline narrowed. At this point, Nenov

showed great courage and patience to change his game and switch to the defensive, fighting his way all the way back to his end of the piste, picking off his opponent with well-timed ripostes and counter-attacks. The change worked, and he was able to stretch his lead again and close out the final 15-9.

It was fantastic to see Cambridge fencers finish 1st, 1st, 3rd and 5th, by far the best squad performance of the day, especially given only one of our fencers was eliminated by an opponent from another university! Particularly pleasing was to see former Novice Varsity squad members stepping up to compete individually, especially those from the 2015 squad. It's just a shame Nenko hasn't left himself any room to improve on his result, given he will still be eligible next year!